1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
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Gunabibi sequences and many of the men and the leaders who sing them are at present subincised.[3]

The ceremonial life of the Murngin seems to be constantly enriched by cultural waves coming from the south—that is, from Central Australia—as will be demonstrated when we examine their burial customs from an historical point of view. The technological borrowings, of recent times at least, are from the seacoast and not from the inland. We must turn to the Malay contacts to see what traits have been taken and by what cultural processes they have been chosen from the contact of the Malay traders from the north and west.

Malay Influence on the Aboriginal Cultures of Northeastern Arnhem Land

The Malays, from an early date, made yearly voyages down through the East Indian Islands and through the Arafura Sea to the northern coast of Australia. Their prows sailed into many harbors and river mouths that indent the coast, from the Victoria River, which flows into the Indian Ocean in West Australia, to the southern limits of the Gulf of Carpentaria in the east.

Sir Matthew Flinders, in the second volume of his *Voyage to Terra Australis*, reports having seen first evidences of the Malays in the Pellew Islands.[4] He next speaks of them when he was anchored at Caledon

[3] The people to the south and west of the Murngin practice subincision. It seems to have a distribution that projects up the Goyder River to the Crocodile Islands. The following people practice it; Rainbarngo, the people around Cape Stewart, the Djinba, Ritarngo, the Marunga Island people (some do, some do not—it is a matter of personal choice), and the Burera (a matter of personal choice). None of the people east of them go through this ordeal except a few who have made long visits to the people west and south of them and have gone through the Gunabibi ceremony. In the more northern parts of the subincision distribution the cutting is unritualized. Two men go out and stand in a river or pool to above their waists. One takes a sharp stone knife and splits the urethra of the other; either at the same time or later, the one who has been cut reciprocates by performing the same operation on his friend. Farther south, subincision is a definite part of the Gunabibi ceremony. Clitoridectomy also seems to be practiced in this ceremony by these southern peoples. It seems likely that if other factors do not disturb the culture, the subincision element of the Gunabibi will spread into northeastern Arnhem Land and become a part of the ritual within this area. Many of the people at the present day sing a subincision song as part of the ceremony even though they do not go through the ordeal.

[4] Page 172—"Pellew Group: December, 1802: Indications of some foreign people having visited this group were almost as numerous, and as widely extended as those left by the natives. Besides pieces of earthen jars and trees cut with axes, we found remnants of bamboo lattice work, palm leaves sewed with cotton thread into the form of such hats as are worn by the Chinese, and the remains of blue cotton trousers, of the fashion called moormans. A wooden anchor of one fluke, and three boats' rudders of violet wood were also found; but what puzzled me most was a collection of stones piled together in a line, resembling a low wall, with short lines running perpendicularly at the back, dividing the space behind into compartments. In each of these

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
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175 Bay,[5] but it was not until he had reached the English Company Islands that he actually came in contact with the Malays themselves.[6]

were the remains of a charcoal fire, and all the wood near at hand had been cut down. Mr. Brown saw on another island a similar construction, with not less than thirty-six partitions, over which was laid a rude piece of frame work: and the neighboring mangroves, to the extent of an acre and a half, had been cut down. It was evident that these people were Asiatics, but of what particular nation, or what their business here, could not be ascertained; I suspected them, however, to be Chinese, and that the nutmegs might possibly be their object. From the traces amongst Wellesley's Island, they had been conjectured to be shipwrecked people; but that opinion did not now appear to be correct."

[5] Page 213—"Caledon Bay: February, 1803: That this bay had before received the visits of some strangers, was evinced by the knowledge which the natives had of fire arms; they imitated the act of shooting when we first landed, and when a musket was fired at their request, were not much alarmed. A quantity of posts was lying near the water, which had been evidently cut with iron instruments; and when we inquired of the inhabitants concerning them, they imitated with their hands the motion of an axe cutting down a tree, and then stopping, exclaimed Poo! Whence we understood that the people who cut the wood had fire arms. This was all that could be learned from the natives; but from the bamboos and partitions of frame work found here, similar to those of Pellew's Group, they were doubtless the same Asiatic nation, if not the same individuals, of whom so many traces had been seen all the way from the head of the Gulph."

[6] Pages 228-233—"English Company's Islands: February, 1803, Thursday 17: After clearing the narrow passage between Cape Wilberforce and Bromny's Isles, we followed the main coast to the S.W.; having on the starboard hand some high and large islands, which closed in towards the coast a-head so as to make it doubtful whether there were any passage between them. Under the nearest island was perceived a canoe full of men; and in a sort of roadsted, at the south end of the same island, there were six vessels covered over like hulks, as if laid up for the bad season. Our conjectures were various as to who those people could be, and what their business here; but we had little doubt of their being the same, whose traces had been found so abundantly in the Gulph. I had inclined to the opinion that these traces had been left by Chinese, and the report of the natives in Caledon Bay that they had fire arms, strengthened the supposition; and combining this with the appearance of the vessels, I set them down for piratical Ladrones who secreted themselves here from pursuit, and issued out as the season permitted, or prey invited them. Impressed with this idea, we tasked to work up for the road; and our pendant and ensign being hoisted, each of them hung out a small white flag.

". . . we learned that they were prows from Macassar, and the six Malay commanders shortly afterwards came on board in a canoe. It happened fortunately that my cook was a Malay, and through his means I was able to communicate with them. The chief of the six prows was a short, elderly man, named Pobassoo; he said there were upon the coast, in different divisions, sixty prows, and that Salloo was the commander in chief. These people were Mahometans, and on looking into the launch, expressed great horror to see hogs there; nevertheless they had no objection to port wine, and even requested a bottle to carry away with them at sunset.

"Friday 18, February 1803: My desire to learn every thing concerning these people, and the strict look-out which it had been necessary to keep upon them, prevented me attending to any other business during their stay. According to Pobassoo, from whom my information was principally obtained, sixty prows belonging to the Rajah of Boni,

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
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The Malay trading in North Australia excited Flinders' curiosity, and after leaving the continent and arriving at Timor he inquired further into their trading methods and also attempted to discover when trade with Australia had first started. His statement that "but twenty years before one of their prows was driven by the Northwest monsoon to the coast of New Holland" was the beginning of the trading relations between the East

and carrying one thousand men, had left Macassar with the north-west monsoon, two months before, upon an expedition to this coast; and the fleet was then lying in different places to the westward, five or six together, Pobassoo's division being the foremost. These prows seemed to be about twenty-five tons, and to have twenty-five men in each; that of Pobassoo carried two small brass guns, obtained from the Dutch, but the others had only muskets; besides which, every Malay wears a cress or dagger, either secretly or openly. I inquired after bows and arrows, and the ippo poison, but they had none of them; and it was with difficulty they could understand what was meant by the ippo.

"The object of their expedition was a certain marine animal, called trepang. Of this they gave me two dried specimens; and it proved to be the *beche-de-mer*, or sea cucumber which we had first seen on the reefs of the East Coast, and had afterwards hauled on shore so plentifully with the seine, especially in Caledon Bay. They get the trepang by diving, in from 3 to 8 fathoms water; and where it is abundant, a man will bring up eight or ten at a time. The mode of preserving it is this: the animal is split down one side, boiled, and pressed with a weight of stones; then stretched open by slips of bamboo, dried in the sun, and afterwards in smoke, when it is fit to be put away in bags, but requires frequent exposure to the sun. A thousand trepang make a picol, of about 125 Dutch pounds; and one hundred picols are a cargo for a prow. It is carried to Timor, and sold to the Chinese, who meet them there; and when all the prows are assembled, the fleet returns to Macassar. By Timor, seemed to be meant Timur-laoet; for when I inquired concerning the English, Dutch, and Portugues there, Pobassoo knew nothing of them: he had heard of Coepang, a Dutch settlement, but said it was upon another island.

"Saturday 19, February 1803: Pobassoo had made six or seven voyages from Macassar to this coast, within the preceding twenty years, and he was one of the first who came; but had never seen any ship here before. This road was the first rendezvous for his division, to take in water previously to going into the Gulph. One of their prows had been lost the year before, and much inquiry was made concerning the pieces of wreck we had seen; and a canoe's rudder being produced, it was recognized as having belonged to her. They sometimes had skirmishes with the native inhabitants of the coast; Pobassoo himself had been formerly speared in the knee, and a man had been slightly wounded since their arrival in this road: they cautioned us much to beware of the natives.

"They had no knowledge of any European settlement in this country.

". . . They carry a month's water, in joints of bamboo; and their food is rice, cocoa nuts, and dried fish, with a few fowls for the chiefs. The black gummatoo rope, of which we had found pieces at Sir Edward Pellew's Group, was in use on board the prows; and they said it was made from the same palm whence the sweet sirup, called gulah, is obtained.

"My numberless questions were answered patiently, and with apparent sincerity; Pobassoo even stopped one day longer at my desire, than he had intended, for the north-west monsoon, he said, would not blow quite a month longer, and he was rather late."

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937.
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Indies and Australia seems rather doubtful, and it is highly likely that trade had been going on long before this period.[7]

Norman B. Tindale, in his recent monograph, "The Natives of Groote Eylandt and the West Coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria,"[8] also speaks of evidences of the Malays in the area in which he did his field work. He mentions the tamarind trees left by the Malays, and the old anchorages, as well as the cemetery sites.

In the region from Cape Stewart and the Crocodile Islands (in the Arafura Sea and to the west and north of northeastern Arnhem Land) to Caledon Bay and the Gulf of Carpentaria there were several concentration points used by the Malays in their trade relations with the local natives. The chief centers were at Malay Bay in the east, Elcho Island, on a mound formed by an old native camp site at the eastern mouth of the Caddell Straits, and at Millingimbi Island, in the Crocodile group in the west. It was at these centers that the Malays took down the great fiber sails and mast-poles from their ships and made anchor for the rainy season.

The voyagers made their first appearance each year when the monsoons drove their cumbersome ships down from Timor Laut and Macassar through the Arafura Sea to Malay Bay and the other landing points. According to the blacks, there was considerable competition among the various ships to arrive in Arnhem Land first because of the larger harvest the first traders reaped. The competition occasionally resulted in ships remaining all through the dry season to be on location before the others arrived in October or November. The informants declare that "when the first lightning came, the Macassar man came, too."

Economic Organization of the Malay Traders.—In the whole area the Malays did not establish any permanent settlements in which a permanent

[7] Page 257—"Timor: April, 1803: I made many inquiries concerning the Malay trepang fishers, whom we had met at the entrance of the Gulph of Carpentaria, and learned the following particulars. The natives of Macassar had been long accustomed to fish for the trepang amongst the islands in the vicinity of Java, and upon a dry shoal lying to the south of Rottee; but about twenty years before, one of their prows was driven by the north-west monsoon to the coast of New Holland, and finding the trepang to be abundant, they afterwards returned; and had continued to fish there since that time. The governor was of the opinion, that the Chinese did not meet them at Timor-laoet, but at Macassar itself, where they are accustomed to trade for birds' nests, trepang, sharks' fins, &c.; and it therefore seems probable that the prows rendezvous only at Timor-laoet, on quitting Carpentaria, and then return in a fleet, with their cargoes.

"The value of the common trepang at Canton, was said to be forty dollars the picol, and for the best, or black kind, sixty; which agrees with what I had been told in Malay Road, allowing to the Chinese the usual profit of cent. per cent. (from Macassar to their own country)."

[8] Tindale, Norman B., "The Natives of Groote Eylandt and the West Coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria," *Records of the Australian Museum*, March 31, 1926, Vol. III, No. 2.

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
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population occupied a site for the entire year. No Malay women were allowed to accompany the men on their southern voyages. With the exception of the tamarind tree and possibly the bamboo, no flora of the East Indies were deliberately transplanted to the northern coast of Australia. The Malays did not engage in any form of agriculture here. Although they brought rice for trade with the aborigines, none was ever planted by them or the natives. It may be possible that two cocoanut palm trees reported by the natives of the Kolpa clan of Cape Wessel Island were planted by the western trader, but it is also possible that the two trees sprouted from cocoanuts carried in by the tides, which bring hundreds of these nuts to the shores of northern Arnhem Land.[9]

The Malay traders made these long trips from their native islands to Australia because they wanted to acquire the native pearl shell, pearls, tortoise shell, trepang, and sandal wood, found all along the shores of North Australia. The natives received in return dugout canoes, rice, molasses, tobacco, cloth for sarongs, belts, knives, tomahawks, gin, and pipes, as well as other articles of trade. The Malay did not come to establish outposts of his civilization and promote agriculture, nor had he any desire to proselytize the aborigines to worship his gods; he came to trade for highly valued articles on which the natives placed little value, and when he had accomplished his purpose he was glad to go home to Macassar, Koepang, or Timor Laut. Consequently he had little effect on the native civilization or its racial stock.

The various head men of the coastal clans were made "kings" by Malay traders. Usually the brother of the "king" was also made a "king" to assist his older brother—apparently a Malay adaptation of native custom, since the ceremonial leader of a clan usually has his younger brother to assist him. The head men were put in charge of their clansmen in the trepang expeditions. Friendships grew up between various Malays and aborigines to the extent that the black fathers took their young sons down to the Malay boats and pointed out the men who were to be their trading friends when they were grown up. This indicates a tendency to organize the trade on the basis of the patrilineal line, which again shows that the Malays did not attempt to change native civilization, but merely adapted themselves to the native social institutions.

The gin traded to the natives caused occasional great drunken orgies, and much blood was shed in interclan fights that came to a head under this alcoholic stimulation. However, the alcohol seems to have had no effect upon the general well-being of the people.

[9] The ocean currents are exceptionally rapid in the Arafura Sea and the distances of no great length from cocoanut-growing areas, which makes it highly possible that of the tens of thousands of nuts washed ashore through the years, two of them might have taken root. Recent researches have shown that cocoanuts can remain in sea water for a considerable period of time without losing their germinating power.

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
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175 Many of the black men went back to the Malay country with the returning fleets and stayed through the intervening season. There are a few cases of men who stayed permanently and married Malay women, but this was very rare.

The Malays also bought spears and spear-throwers from the blacks, but it is likely that this was done in modern times because of their interest in them as mementos rather than weapons.

175 177 439 438 The trade with the Malays seems to have been purely on a basis of exchange, with very little else in its social content. Nevertheless, it had little effect on the aboriginal ideas of trade. The Murngin trade is fairly extensive. The native sometimes exchanges things he possesses for the things he needs and cannot get from his own territory; but the larger basis of trade in northeastern Arnhem Land is one of social reciprocity which establishes a social bond between the traders and enlarges the social periphery of each. A trade between two people is considerably ritualized, and may be an exchange of the same objects, such as carved spears, spear-throwers, or baskets.

All this again shows the strong resistance of the Murngin culture to outside influence. The Malay trader came for an exchange of goods and nothing else; and it would be thought that, in the hundreds of years he is likely to have been in Arnhem Land, he would have given a new impetus to Murngin ideas of exchange. But as far as can be determined, the Murngin ideas are no different from what they were before he arrived, since the trade life fits into the general setting of their culture. Further, this system of exchange is no different from that of the interior tribes, and it is still not a matter of pure economics, but is of more significance to the social and ritualistic life of the people.

175 177 *Malay Influence on the Aboriginal Material Culture.*—Although the influence of the Malay was of no great importance, nevertheless it had considerable influence upon certain aspects of the material culture of the tribes who occupied the coastal plains along the Arafura Sea and the western shores of the Gulf of Carpentaria.

In brief, the Malay introduced the dugout canoe, its mast and pandanus sail, the Malay type of pipe, a fashion for cutting the beard in a kind of Van Dyke style, and an appreciation for iron and other metals. It is possible the tides had carried in wooden planks with metal on them before the Malay arrived in Australia, for at the present time the natives often find planks with nails, which they extract and use for fish hooks. The tomahawk was also brought into North Australia and became a part of the native culture, partly supplanting, along the coast, the ground stone axe. It was, of course, not made by the Australians. The technique of grinding a stone axe is still known by the men of these tribes. The metal axes did not come in sufficient number to supply all the needs of the

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929) 1937
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natives. It is unlikely that many iron axes ever reached the interior peoples; and the proximity of stone and the native's tendency to lose his implements (which necessitates constant replacements) greatly contributed to the continuation of this stone-axe technique in the aboriginal culture.

The dugout canoe used by the natives possesses no outrigger; but it is a fairly well-shaped boat and is much superior to the indigenous bark canoe that the native had used as his chief means of water transport before the arrival of the Malay. The Malays who traded with the Australians used the double outrigger. Some of the present-day natives know how to make an outrigger, but this addition to the dugout was not appreciated by the more conservative aborigines, and never became part of their culture. It is likely that this was due to the influence of their own bark canoe. This latter boat lacked an outrigger, and it was easier and simpler to learn how to manage a dugout canoe without an outrigger than to learn how to operate one with it.

Judging from the direct evidence of the natives who were alive at the time when the Malays were still coming to North Australia, it is probable that the blacks did not manufacture their own dugouts until the white Australian government sent its gunboats up to the western entrance of the Arafura Sea and prevented Malay trade with the black natives. Several informants reported that when the last consignment of canoes was eventually broken up, all of the people went back to bark canoes, but that a few of the men from the English Company Islands had learned how to make the dugout, and the manufacture of this type of boat was learned from them. This story seems likely, for the termination of the Malay voyages occurred when several of the informants were old enough to observe and to remember the exact circumstances. Groote Eylandt and Caledon Bay were also concentration points of the Malays. Groote Eylandt particularly was a region where the native culture had more intensive contact with Malay traders. Possibly dugout manufacture was learned there and the English Company Island people relearned it from their southern neighbors.[10]

The conservatism of Australian material culture is more or less demonstrated by the persistence of the bark canoe. Even today men who know how to make a dugout with outrigger equipment paddle their bark canoes across the open sea from island to island and from the various points of land. The fashioning of a dugout canoe takes much longer and requires more skill than any other article in the North Australian technology; further, after it has been made, it becomes a more or less permanent part of a man's equipment. The bark canoe is easily constructed; it can be made for immediate use with very little labor, and the material for its construction is always at hand. Its value in labor is consequently little, and it can be discarded with no feeling of loss. A bark canoe is seldom used after

[10] Tindale, *op. cit.*

1: Warner E-5 (1926-1929)1937
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how to make it. There was no arduous labor attached to collecting turtle shell to trade for an axe, for the shell came as a by-product to the pursuit of harpooning turtles. The making of the stone axe took time and a considerable amount of hard labor; but to go turtle hunting was a pleasure, since turtle harpooning expeditions are not only for the anticipated enjoyment of the flesh and to supply the family larder, but also for the pure joy of stalking the turtle, spearing it, and bringing it home to an admiring audience which could appreciate one's abilities as a hunter and a man of importance. Undoubtedly pride of workmanship is felt by a native axe-maker. His fellow tribesmen always express their appreciation of a well-turned-out axe or spear head, but the social approbation given to the two occupations is completely disproportionate.

The turtle shell had never been used, and had been discarded until the Malay came; that it should become an article of high value to the trader was an item of some amusement and a fortuitous circumstance for the aborigines. Since the women gather oysters, the trading of pearls for the Malay objects of trade was looked upon by the black as an even greater bit of luck than the trading of shell.

The trepang (*beche-de-mer*) industry demanded more effort. In this activity the Malay showed himself a practical sociologist, for he again made no vain attempt to change Murngin civilization to his liking, but merely used the institutions he found among them to satisfy his wants.

Canoes were given to certain men who, with their clansmen, gathered the sea slugs from the low-lying sand banks at low tide. All this the native understood, since it was but one added particular to a general type of behavior; and although the blacks do not eat trepang, this animal belongs to a group of seashore fauna which are gathered and eaten, and could have been added to the diet without any change in the methods of acquiring food. But there is one element in the economic structure of Murngin civilization that must have made this adaptation somewhat difficult, since the sexual division of labor allots the task of gathering mollusk and other seashore foods to the women. Men only gather these articles of diet for their own use when they have no women with them and there is nothing else to eat. It is very likely that if the natives could not have speared fish or harpooned dugong or turtle while looking for trepang beds, the Malays would have found the industry unprofitable, if not impossible.

The Malay brought the tamarind fruit with him. The seeds that were thrown away sprouted, and now the lands where he voyaged are known by their growth of the tamarind tree. Many of these trees are very large. The circles of trees which surround the spot where once a huge tamarind tree had grown show that they are secondary growths and do not represent the earliest period of the Malay contact. No one knows how long the Malay has been making his voyages to Australia. The writer attempted to find

3: Mountford E-5 (1948) 1956 OE17 Murngin OE17

INTRODUCTION

THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY-Smithsonian Institution-Commonwealth of Australia Expedition to Arnhem Land was planned as a result of negotiations between representatives of the Australian Government and the National Geographic Society of Washington, U.S.A. (2) 122

The attention of the Society's officials had been drawn to the possibilities of research in the remote parts of Australia by two coloured films on aboriginal life, 'Tjurunga' and 'Walkabout', which had been made by Mr Charles P. Mountford whilst he was leader of the 1940 and 1942 Adelaide University anthropological expeditions to Central Australia. These films attracted the attention of the Director-General of Information, who decided to send Mr Mountford on a lecture tour to the U.S.A., as part of the Australian overseas information programme.

During the tour, the largest and most enthusiastic audience was four thousand members of the National Geographic Society, in the Constitution Hall, Washington. The interest of the Research Committee of the National Geographic Society stimulated Mr Mountford to submit a proposal for a scientific research expedition to Arnhem Land. To this proposal the National Geographic Society agreed, appointed Mr Mountford as leader, and after negotiations between the Australian Minister at Washington, Sir Frederic Eggleston, and the Minister for Information, the Hon. A. A. Calwell, the Commonwealth Government offered to make Mr Mountford's services available and to provide transport for the expedition.

The original expedition party suggested by the National Geographic Society was to have been small, an American biologist from the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, and Mr Mountford, to study the various phases of aboriginal life.

This was, however, further considered by the Australian Government. Realizing that such an expedition afforded a great opportunity both to better the good relations between Australia and the United States of America, and to investigate one of the least known parts of Australia, the Minister for Information arranged for the party to be much more comprehensive, consisting of both American and Australian naturalists and ethnologists.

Arnhem Land[1] was chosen because, being an almost unknown country, there had been very little research into its natural history and ethnology; for it is a curious fact that although the Gulf of Carpentaria and Arnhem Land were the first parts of Australia to be discovered, they are still the least known parts of the Australian continent. (2)

As early as 1606 Willem Janszoon, in the yacht *Duyfken*, had sailed down the east coast of the Gulf of Carpentaria, turning back at Cape Keerweer, without realizing he had discovered the largest unexplored land mass in the world. (2) 175

1. Map. Fig. 1.

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3: Mountford E-5 (1948) 1956 OI17 Murngin OI17

Seventeen years later Jan Carstensz, with his two ships *Pera* and *Arnhem*, sailed along the shores of Arnhem Land. It is from the name of the latter vessel that the region takes its name. In 1644, Tasman mapped part of the coastline and discovered Groote Eylandt (Large Island), on which we were to establish our first base camp. Between 1644 and 1803, when Flinders surveyed the coastline of the Gulf of Carpentaria, no Europeans sailed in those waters.[2] And since Flinders' departure, although means of transport have improved immeasurably, Arnhem Land has remained practically unknown.

Since the expedition, however, the resulting publicity, its films, and what is already known about its scientific results, have increased the interest in the ethnology and the natural history of this remote part of Australia.

W. A. McLAREN
Secretary
Department of the Interior

Canberra, A.C.T.
December, 1955

2. It is possible that the *Baipai* people were an isolated group of Europeans (Dutch or Portuguese) who once visited Port Bradshaw. See p. 354.

8: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1954
OI17 Murngin OI17

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND

Arnhem Land, through the centuries, has attracted to its shores a variety of both Asiatic and European voyagers, some interested in exploration for its own sake, and some for economic or commercial reasons. Between the middle of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth, this northern part of Australia became known to the Western World through the discoveries of the Dutch and Portuguese.[1] Considerably earlier, however, the coastal regions of Arnhem Land had been visited regularly by Indonesian traders. The date of their first arrival has not been definitely established: but we can make tentative suggestions, based on the traditional records which the Arnhem Land natives have handed down from one generation to another.

In addition to this fairly intensive contact over a long period, Arnhem Land became comparatively well-known during the last phase of Malay-Macassan association with our north coast, and during the exploration of certain English voyagers just before and during the establishment of European settlements.

Later on came the attempted European settlement of this part of the Northern Territory, and the exploitation of its waters for marine products. Japanese and other Asiatics, as well as Europeans, took part in pearling operations; and Christian Mission stations were gradually established at various places all round the Arnhem Land coast. Today only the Missions remain. The whole vast region of Arnhem Land, some 31,200 square miles, is now an Aboriginal Reserve.

In this study of Arnhem Land, we shall see how events fall into their proper historical perspective, from the earliest known

8: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1954
OI17 Murngin OI17

But it is in the realm of the great song cycles and the stories which survive that a colourful picture of Malayan and Macassan life on these shores is unfolded.

At various sites on the north-east and south-east coast of Arnhem Land, at Arnhem Bay, Melville Bay, Port Bradshaw, Trial Bay, Caledon Bay and Groote Eylandt, these Indonesians of different types (not all true Macassan or Malay traders) founded their settlements. They built their houses on stilts, roofed them with woven leaves and fibre of coconut palm and even furnished them in an elementary way. They kept fowls,[2] fastened by one leg to the posts of the huts. Nearby they erected large boilers, and racks for drying the trepang, and out in the bays their ships were lying at anchor or being repaired. Each main settlement was a hive of industry, with Macassans and Australian Aborigines employed as labourers for specified payments. There were bartering depôts. Local natives brought in pearls, tortoise-shell and other natural products that the Indonesians wanted, and were given in exchange East Indies currency, introduced foods such as rice and sweetmeats, or cloth, knives and tobacco. This trade was well established and its influences are still apparent today.[3]

The visitors not only brought goods from their own country. While they were settled on the mainland they manufactured pottery, knives, cloth and sails, and they kept written accounts of their transactions with the Aborigines and with their own employees. The effects of their sojourn are seen in some forms of the local material culture. They introduced the dug-out canoe, which has almost replaced the indigenous bark variety, and it was from them that the natives learned to use steel in making knives, spear blades and tomahawks.

But it seems to have been in their diversions and entertainments, or in their ceremonies, that the Indonesians exerted their greatest influence on Aboriginal life. Watching them, the Aborigines learnt to play cards,[4] and began to adapt their song rhythms to alien tunes and the sounds of foreign musical instruments. Their mortuary ceremonies came to be associated with the departure of the praus, and with Macassan burial rites.[5] The important secular ceremony of the carved *wuramu* figure, the

8: Berndt E-5 (1946-1950) 1954
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more inclined to be blatant about sexual associations, while the other, perhaps equally promiscuous, is less willing to acknowledge this fact in public.

Even before the memorable meeting of Captain Mathew Flinders with Pobassoo, on 17 February 1803,[11] in the "Malay Road" between the English Company Islands and the mainland near Cape Wilberforce, Dutch and Portuguese voyagers had visited the north coast of Australia,[12] but their contact with the Aborigines seems to have been only transitory and unimportant. Before this, too, there is reason to believe that these coastal people had some association with native groups of the Torres Strait Islands and southern New Guinea. This subject is treated in one of the long song cycles of eastern Arnhem Land — although in later years, when the Missions introduced Badu Islanders (from the Torres Straits), these indigenous songs proved receptive in some degree to new ideas concerning that area.[13]

Mathew Flinders was followed by other explorers and surveyors,[14] until in the last quarter of the nineteenth century European traders became increasingly familiar with the Arnhem Land coast. About this time the relations between Macassans and the Aborigines began to deteriorate, and a number of massacres of these Indonesian visitors[15] were reported. Intercourse between Aborigines and Europeans was far from amicable. Mass shootings took place, native women were abducted, and some white men were speared. There was an attempt to settle part of the "Arafura" country, between Milingimbi and Elcho Island; in 1885 Florida cattle station was established near Mount Delight, between the Woolen and Blyth rivers.[16]

When the Macassan visits to the north coast came to an end there was an influx of Japanese pearlers and traders, and a few Europeans began to concentrate on trepanging. These people employed on their boats Aborigines from Darwin, Bathurst and Melville Islands and Goulburn Islands, as well as natives from the Torres Strait Islands, so that the coastal Arnhem Landers came in contact with a variety of "racial" types. The Japanese, for example, did not remain for long on friendly terms with the local natives; there were occasional spearings and massacres,

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175 648 177 especially in the region about Caledon Bay and Blue Mud Bay. Some Europeans too were involved in spearings, so that by the 1930's the Aborigines of these parts had gained a reputation for being "savage and warlike".

The natives, however, were not entirely to blame for their occasional attacks on invading strangers, who had not the long-standing trade ties of economic reciprocity and friendship that the Indonesians had enjoyed. When we look more closely into the underlying reasons we can understand that the Aborigines might well have resisted the insidious forms of exploitation, the low bartering estimates, and the constant interference with their womenfolk. Matters were accentuated by a punitive expedition led by police, which went with horses from Milingimbi to Blue Mud Bay and Caledon Bay,[17] and indiscriminately shot a number of Aborigines; while the killing of a police constable on Woodah Island, near Groote Eylandt, aroused a *crescendo* of publicity and outcry in Southern newspapers of the day.[18]

175 177 797 By 1930 several Mission stations had been set up at various places along the coast, so that in succeeding years most of the Aborigines in this region were in more or less constant contact with missionaries. A Church Missionary Society expedition in 1934, and a local trepanger, apprehended some natives who were asociated with a Japanese massacre at Caledon Bay and brought them to Darwin for trial. Soon after this, in 1935, Dr Donald Thomson set out on a pacificatory expedition with the purpose of finding out the reasons for the hostility of these natives, the extent of Japanese contact, and the general nature of local conditions.[19] During the north-west monsoon season of 1935-36 and during 1936-37 unrest among these Aborigines became more marked, mainly owing to the invasion of the Arnhem Land Aboriginal Reserve[20] by large numbers of Japanese and European traders.[21] Missionary enterprise was extended and intensified too, attacking indigenous forms of social behaviour and morality in a way which met with little positive resistance — although attempts were made to oppose the less insidious intrusion of traders, bent on purely economic (and sexual) exploitation. Evangelisation became closely co-ordinated with the aim of establishing all along

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the coast, centres of white settlement in the form of Mission stations. These Mission bodies were interested mainly in the problems of becoming self-supporting, of saving the Aborigines' souls, and of disseminating European beliefs and conventions.

A little before war was declared between Australia and Japan the visits of Japanese traders and pearlers to the Arnhem Land coast were curtailed, and finally forbidden altogether. Army, Air Force and Naval bases were formed in various parts of the Northern Territory, particularly after the bombing of Darwin in 1942-43. On the north-eastern coast the main camps of this kind were at Gove (Yirrkalla Mission settlement), Milingimbi, and the Wessel Islands, while there was a civil aviation and Air Force base at Groote Eylandt. Aborigines of these parts came subsequently into close contact with several thousands of Air Force and Army (as well as Naval) personnel. They were indented for menial work and employed in a variety of ways. Boats and 'planes were continually passing to and fro;[22] and the isolated crashes of a few 'planes, the activity of Army camp life and entertainment, and other phenomena of an artificial and abnormal life, heightened and altered the tempo of indigenous life. Traditional ceremonies and food-collecting were interrupted and curtailed, and the equilibrium of social life in general was far more deeply disturbed than it had been throughout all the preceding centuries of alien contact.

When these military establishments were finally abandoned (the last, Gove, in April 1946) the Aborigines were left to Missions whose staffs had been depleted, and who could not provide steady employment for the many natives who clustered about their stations. So the natives found themselves longing for the old times, when food and trade goods were generously distributed. The customary staid smoothness of Mission life, with its calm treatment of religion, they found depressing. Where, they asked, were the war-time picture shows, that brought before them rough-riding cowboys, lingering love scenes, and partially-naked white women, and the strange musical accompaniments of this form of entertainment? This nostalgia for past pleasures led to increasing signs of irresponsibility among the younger people, a

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trend towards sexual excess and a desire for increased contact with Europeans.

Such is the general outline of the conditions that have some bearing on our main theme.

During the Malay-Macassan epoch the Aborigines seem to have maintained a fairly well integrated pattern of culture, absorbing or discarding new ideas without seriously disturbing its basic structure. The early Indonesians were to the Aborigines just representatives of another clan or tribal group not greatly dissimilar to their own, and so they carried on trade with these visitors, just as they would with members of other clans who had desirable commodities to barter. It was a natural outcome of this that the Aborigines should extend their traditional codes of hospitality, making their womenfolk available to the Macassan traders.[23] When the strangers were thus provided with temporary or permanent wives, the social organisation of the groups and the personal opinions of their members were adjusted to suit both parties – and so a delicate problem was settled. Occasional arguments and fights did break out between them, but these were usually regarded as being comparable to inter-clan feuds or quarrels.

Once the quantities of intoxicating drink began to enter the settlements, especially during the last phase of Macassan contact, relations began to deteriorate. There was irregular promiscuity, women were bartered in return for goods, and quarrelling and fights became more bitter and more frequent. Stories relating the sexual excess that took place during this period show how strongly this behaviour affected the psychological makeup of the Aborigines. Old women of north-eastern Arnhem Land like to talk about the days of Macassan contact, and they contrast the uneventful period of recent years with the time when drinking bouts resulted in sexual promiscuity, and food and clothing were easily obtainable. Even the time of plenty that accompanied the Air Force occupation was not the same, they say, as the old trading days and the glamour of the Indonesian visitors.

When the Japanese and European traders came to this coast, the Aborigines at first resented their intrusion. "Why," they asked, "do these strangers take the place of our old friends?"

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CHAPTER 17

AFTERMATH

The direct repercussions of these murders and killings are of special interest to us here. 175

The great Arnhem Land Reserve had been declared in 1931, as a result of Bleakley's Report[1] of 1928, and a conference held in 1929[2] by representatives of Missions, societies and associations interested in Aboriginal welfare. This report and this conference were indications of changing public opinion throughout Australia in relation to the Aboriginal question. More and more people and societies were willing to offer sympathy and, what was at that time most important, constructive suggestions. 648 797

The establishing of this Reserve, it was hoped, would put an end to undesirable alien contact in the shape of European and Japanese[3] traders, pearlers and beachcombers, thus halting the detribalisation of the Aborigines and ensuring greater opportunities for missionary endeavour. The Reserve was, officially, inviolable. Only missionaries, officials, and other accredited people were to be permitted within its boundaries. But it was quite impossible to patrol adequately such a long coast-line and so large a territory, and from time to time unauthorised people did enter the Reserve. This was especially the case during the first few years, when there was still a sprinkling of trepangers and pearlers, and Japanese infiltration became actually intensified. It was during these years, too, that the Aborigines committed most of the killings mentioned in the foregoing chapters.

From the natives' point of view, the formation of this Reserve meant nothing at all. Most of them knew nothing about it, and those who did cared less. Why should they bother about a 175 648

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175 Reserve? It was their own territory, where their ancestors had
648 lived, and they were bound to it by strong spiritual ties. Laws were passed by an alien Government, about which they knew very little, and which was (so they thought at that time) no concern of theirs. Japanese, and a few Europeans, were still round the coast; conditions had not perceptibly changed.

175 Since the termination of Indonesian contact there had been a
648 lag in trading, but the Missions, which since 1916 had been
177 spreading along the coast, were helping to fill this gap. From
191 that date, and much earlier in the Roper River area, the Aborigines began to drift into these Mission stations and to avail themselves of the opportunities they offered. They did not as yet distinguish between the different forms of contact. The Japanese aims of exploitation were, in their eyes, very much the same as those of the Europeans, while they scarcely differentiated between these white traders and the missionaries. European traders and missionaries, officials and police, were representatives of an alien form of Government, which did not recognise the hereditary rights and legal codes of the Aborigines themselves.

175 How could these people judge differently, when they observed
648 from actual cases that the missionaries, trepangers and police
177 worked hand in hand together—as, for instance, during the Caledon Bay trial? They realised too that the Europeans were unwilling to believe them, particularly in the matter of evidence given in court. Their dialects were not understood, and the interpreters at their disposal not always reliable. What was justice to them was crime to the Europeans, an outlook largely determined by the cultural pattern of each group.

So the natives were thrown on their own resources, and felt obliged to settle the matter of their defence in their own way. When this conflicted with European interests, they seem to have realised that they would have to sublimate their own views, or else pay the full penalty of acting on their own initiative; and this penalty involved either physical violence or imprisonment or both. In the white man's court of law the Aborigines were inarticulate, and powerless to defend themselves. Had they known that an increasing number of white Australians were interested in their welfare, and ready to step forward in their

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defence, they might have been flattered. It is hard to tell. More probably they would have dismissed these people and their sympathy as being irrelevant and negligible, for the eastern Arnhem Landers, in particular, have a strong sense of their own importance. These aliens did not know them intimately and personally, had not lived with them, and understood nothing of their language, and the complexities of their tribal life. No, for the time being (so they seem to have decided) they would have to depend on themselves alone, until they became articulate and their rights, as a minority, were realised and appreciated.

So much for the early days of the Arnhem Land Reserve, and for the attitude of the Aborigines living within it. We shall return later on to this subject, and see just how far conditions have changed today.

What were the direct results of the murders of Europeans and Japanese during the early 1930's? The opinion of Australians in general, apart from those who were indifferent or apathetic, seems to fall into three main categories. The extremists held that "the niggers should be taught a lesson", and that the best means of doing this was a punitive expedition. Such measures, they contended, had always succeeded in the past. The natives were, so to speak, beaten into subjection, and "cheeky" behaviour effectively discouraged. The conservative view, on the other hand, was that the culprits should be brought to justice and punished, and so made an example to others. The moderates insisted that a pacification expedition should be sent to Arnhem Land, the true circumstances of the killings investigated, and conditions altered so that there would be no need for a recurrence. As we have seen, the conservative plan was adopted and the extremist viewpoint officially discarded, while an attempt was made to put into practice the moderate view. Let us, then, glance in greater detail at some of these repercussions.

When the Minister of the Interior at Canberra heard that Traynor and Fagan had been killed by Aborigines, he declared that the matter was serious, and that some attempt should be made to secure the safety of white men legitimately engaged in the Territory.[4] The Darwin *Northern Standard* of 5 September 1933

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175 announced that a punitive expedition would be sent to Arnhem 648 Land to avenge the death of Constable McColl on Woodah Island. "Despite strong protests from missionaries and others," continued the report, "the Federal Government has sent all supplies required to equip a formidable punitive expedition against the Aborigines in Arnhem Land. Federal Ministers who have had experience of native administration favour a punitive expedition. Lieut.-Col. R. H. Weddell (then Government Resident) strongly urges the necessity of strong measures to teach the natives a lesson. It is contended that unless police authority is upheld the natives will get out of hand, and the massacre of white residents and missionaries will follow. It is argued that if once the natives get the idea they can kill with impunity there is no knowing where they will stop. On the other hand, it is claimed the sending out of a small police party, which included McColl, was ill-advised, as it only roused the natives and incited them to attack".

[797] Missionaries and their associates in the South opposed such measures. They held meetings and protested to the Government, to some effect. But not all missionaries, apparently, were of this opinion — as witness, for example, Mr Dyer's evidence in the McColl murder case. Moderate opinion in the South swayed the Government to decide eventually against a punitive expedition. However, a police party under Constables Morey and Graham was sent out to Groote Eylandt via the Roper River. They did not plan to use Mission transport, for "as far as is possible care will be taken to remove the impression from the minds of the Aboriginals that the police are working in conjunction with the missionaries. Despite reference in the Southern Press regarding a punitive expedition, Superintendent Stretton emphasised his assertion that no punitive expedition of a death-dealing nature had ever been contemplated by the Administration in connection with any police party sent or to be sent to Caledon Bay. No extensive patrol work would be done by the police party either on Groote Eylandt or by boat, in the near or distant vicinity. The police would simply camp there as a protective party until after the wet season".[5]

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The Minister of the Interior (Mr Perkins) later decided a small party of experienced missionaries[6] should attempt to capture the murderers of Constable McColl and the Japanese.

We have already seen how the so-called "murderers" were eventually brought to justice. And at this juncture it is interesting to quote an opinion that appeared in the Southern Press in May 1934, after the Caledon Bay natives had been brought into Darwin for trial, and before the case had come before the Supreme Court.

"It looks as if interest in Caledon Bay may now sleep until Buck Eye and his warriors scupper a few more Japanese. A week or two ago Constable Hall was detailed to visit the region lone-handed and bring back witnesses; but the new Acting Administrator and Commissioner of Police has cancelled the senseless trip, and 'future action against the natives brought to Darwin is a matter for Government consideration'. It is to be hoped that it will think long before proceeding on confessions which might or might not have been pure bravado, and call the farce off. Everybody has had a fair innings – the missionaries their limelight and a Government subsidy, the Abos a free trip and some new experiences, the flapper Press its sensations, and the tax payers their usual privilege of paying for the whole muddle. So everybody should be satisfied."[7]

One of the Territorians, too, among others, had something to say on the murder of white men by Aborigines.[8] "A report comes into Darwin, we'll say of a murder or murders of white men. The police are at once despatched out to capture the native killers. They are captured, brought to Darwin, tried and convicted, sent to Fanny Bay for life. This is only one side of the affair. The public are satisfied. The murderer has been caught and convicted and the murdered man or men avenged. Now we'll look at the other side. The powers that be have never been bothered with this side. The Abo. witnesses who are brought to the trial of these murderers when in court will say anything that pleases, their word not being worth a pinch of salt. Now what did these murdered men do to the blacks to cause their loss of life? An Abo. does not kill without a reason. Was it loot, or were the white men

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175 649 interfering with or kidnapping their lubras, or were they shooting at or over them, or were they fraternising with the blacks, one of the gravest errors a white man can commit? If any of these happenings had occurred other than loot, the Abo. has no redress. The only law he recognises is to kill. He cannot and does not know how to take proceedings against the white man, and furthermore would not be given a hearing were these killings of the white men on the coast caused by any of these happenings? None has bothered to investigate. The Abo. killed a white, that's sufficient. We know Japanese have been killed for their interference with lubras, but what about the white murdered men? Was their crime the same? I cannot tell, because it has never been investigated. My maxim is 'A good Abo. is a dead Abo.' but when it comes to fair play I'm with the Abo. as well as the white man. . . . The greatest mistake is to allow the Abo. to step over the line, fraternise with them, and allow the Abo. to size them up and then their troubles begin, ending only in one way – camp looted or the men murdered".

Mr R. MacDonald, of the Northern Territory Gaol Service, also had comments to make. "When the natives of Arnhem Land are treated decently they are friendly, but imposition and ill treatment are keenly resented. That is why many Japanese trepang fishers and a few white men have felt the full blast of the Aborigines' hostility, and why Arnhem Land is reputed to be peopled by murderous blacks. Men fall very low in those waters. If they would only let the blacks alone they would be all right. They promise the natives all sorts of things, take them hundreds of miles away from their homes, and leave them with nothing. The black will do a lot for a promise – but he'll also do a lot if that promise is not fulfilled".[9]

175 649 797 Towards the end of 1933, the Commonwealth Government made a grant to meet the cost of the peace expedition that the Church Missionary Society had sent to Caledon Bay. It was decided that the Roper River Mission should be closed and a new one opened at Caledon Bay, since the establishment of a Mission station was considered to be an effective means of checking lawlessness among the local natives.[10] But some missionaries were opposed to this move, and the Presbyterian *Messenger* protested:

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"We believe it is a grave blunder to call in the missionaries to become agents of the police . . ."[11] The peace expedition had no really tangible result. There was an unsuccessful attempt to establish a Mission station at Caledon Bay; and the Roper River Mission station did not close down.

An important consequence of the Woodah Island and Caledon Bay murders, the outcry in the Southern Press, and the general agitation of the Administration and missionary bodies and associations, was the appointment of Dr Donald Thomson to visit eastern and north-eastern Arnhem Land. On his first expedition, which lasted from March 1935 until January 1936, he covered a wide area, sailing right around the coast and making some trips into the interior.[12]

As a result, Dr Thomson made certain recommendations regarding the future welfare and government of the Arnhem Landers.[13] It was desirable, he said, to have "absolute segregation. . . . The social structure *in toto* should be preserved as an essential factor in the life of these people". and "the nomadic habits of these people must be regarded as an integral part of their culture. The collecting of natives, not detribalised, into compounds or institutions should be prohibited. If it is desired to teach Christianity to these people, it should be insisted that the Christian teacher or missionary be prepared to visit the people in their own country, and not to gather them about a station or Mission school". Dr Thomson suggested also the "establishment and maintenance of patrols to move about among the nomadic tribes of Arnhem Land, in particular to protect the natives from interference and exploitation, and to maintain a state of domestic peace. Many of the 'attacks' that have occurred in this territory have undoubtedly been merely retaliatory measures to which the natives have been goaded. A particularly unfortunate aspect of these incidents is the fact that vengeance may sometimes be delayed and fall ultimately upon an entirely innocent individual". He listed special qualifications for men entrusted with these patrols, and advised that a medical officer should be employed.

A number of his other recommendations have a more general applicatino and do not specifically relate to Arnhem Land: 'the abolition of the anomalous system under which police constables

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175 648 act as Protectors of Aborigines; the adoption of a settled, uniform policy for the treatment of the whole of the Aboriginal population of Australia; the immediate establishment of a Department of Native Affairs staffed by men selected solely for their special qualifications and sympathies for dealing with the natives, etc.'.

000 Without commenting in detail on these recommendations of Dr Thomson, we should point out that complete segregation is today only an ideal, which could not be put into practice. It would, moreover, be unsatisfactory to the natives themselves, and especially to these coastal Arnhem Landers who have had so many long years of alien contact. The most enlightened course is to bring about their gradual adjustment to changing conditions, trying to keep the best elements in their traditional culture, and at the same time introducing them to the new culture and society to which they must eventually adapt themselves.

175 648 Although the Aborigines are not actually being gathered into compounds, most native camps around the Arnhem Land Mission stations are tending to become more or less static; and under present conditions it would be difficult to alter this. The suggested patrols through Arnhem Land were never instituted, although in the last few years several small patrols under Department of Native Affairs officials have penetrated some regions, and the Administration patrol boat has made a number of trips along the whole Arnhem Land coast. For a long time there was no full-time medical officer concentrating on Aboriginal welfare,[18a] while the majority of police are still "Protectors of Aborigines". Even today there is no co-ordinated Aboriginal policy for the whole of Australia, although several abortive moves have been made in this direction. Each State still controls its own Aboriginal population, with its own local regulations. But the Northern Territory is under Commonwealth jurisdiction. Here a Native Affairs Branch was established in 1939, and some of its patrol officers have received training in anthropology and allied subjects.

Even if Dr Thomson's recommendations were not all put into effect, and even if some are not accorded full approval today by anthropologists and administrators, they were nevertheless significant as far as Arnhem Land was concerned. This was the first time in the history of Arnhem Land, apart from Missionary

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enterprise, that an attempt was made by officialdom to understand the problems of the natives themselves, and the first constructive step in a situation that desperately needed an unbiassed and sympathetic approach. 175 648

Other forces too had been at work behind the scenes, and indeed succeeded in influencing official opinion to a greater extent than did the work of Dr Thomson. To describe this fully would require access to private and confidential papers and so on which are at present unavailable. Unfortunately, from the historian's point of view, these have not been published, and he is forced to rely on the *Reports* of Dr Thomson and of contemporary committees and enquiries. Thomson's *Reports* and recommendations were preceded by much official activity and pressure from scientists (such as Professor A. P. Elkin), Mission bodies and other agencies. Thomson's *Reports* were in harmony with a growing section of public opinion which had for several years been bringing pressure to bear on the Commonwealth Government.

This led eventually to the formulation of what was regarded as a new and positive policy for the Aborigines in the Northern Territory. It was drawn up by the Minister of the Interior (Hon. J. McEwen) and the Secretary of the Department (Mr J. Carrodus), with the help of Professor Elkin. Thus Thomson's recommendations were only one factor in the official and unofficial combination which was serving to introduce a new epoch into Arnhem Land.

Dr Thomson's second trip to Arnhem Land extended from June 1936 to October 1937.[14] During this trip he took back to their home territory the three natives, Neidjalma, Mau and Nagaia, who had been serving sentences for their part in the Caledon Bay massacre.

Dr Thomson's most valuable contribution, in this case, was his report on European and Japanese activities in Arnhem Land. Since this has a direct bearing on the subject we may quote some of his comments.[15] During 1936-37, he said, the invasion of the Reserve by Japanese, and by Europeans (chiefly from Darwin), reached such proportions that conditions he had previously reported were intensified. The Reserve was being violated to such

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175 648 an extent that it was a Reserve only in name. Not only were the natives widely exploited by white men and Japanese, but they were often taken to Darwin and other places by boat, either as passengers, or on vessels with Japanese crews in return for the prostitution of their women. During 1936, in spite of the lessons of 1933, white men were engaged in trepang fishing and other activities, with depôts on the Reserve along the eastern and western coast of Arnhem Land.

Throughout 1937 the growing number of Japanese-manned pearling vessels in the waters of the Reserve was a potent factor in the local unrest that was becoming steadily more serious each month. In May 1936-37, states Dr Thomson, there were upwards of seventy vessels within sight at one time from the beach at Mooroonga Island in the Crocodile Group.[16] One of these vessels, the *Tenjin Maru*, had a crew of fifteen men, so that at a conservative estimate there were perhaps seven hundred Japanese on the Arnhem Land coast at this time. The pearling fleets included boats from Darwin as well as from Thursday Island, in addition to the Japanese vessels. It became their practice to resort to certain anchorages, especially at the King and Liverpool Rivers, at Cape Stewart, Mooroonga Island, and Elcho Island; and here large congregations of Aborigines met the boats. Unrest, instability and lawlessness increased among them, and a state very near chaos resulted.

Dr Thomson, at this time, urged that attention should be paid to his recommendations regarding complete segregation, and the inviolability of the Reserve. He did not stipulate permanent segregation, for all time, but declared: "It should be the policy to maintain these inviolable reserves for the natives who are still in possession of their culture, until and unless a sound working policy and one in the best interests of the Aboriginals is established, tested, and proved by experience over a long period, among the natives who are already detribalised".[17] In another Report he made recommendations similar to those already cited, elaborating on some points but in no way modifying his previous views.[18] These serve as a valuable basis for future discussion and formulation of native policy.

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But although Dr Thomson's reports showed the disastrous results of Japanese infiltration, nothing really effective was done in respect of this until the end of 1941 brought war with Japan. Then, at last, intercourse of these people with the Aborigines was brought to a close.

Little has been said here concerning missionary enterprise in Arnhem Land, a form of contact which has profoundly influenced certain aspects of native life, even though it has only a partial bearing on the main theme of this book. We shall refer to this again in the following chapter. Another factor with which we have not dealt concerns Prof. Lloyd Warner,[19] already mentioned, who carried out anthropological work, principally in the Milingimbi area, between 1926 and 1929 — that is, before the epoch we have been considering in this chapter. This was the first detailed anthropological work undertaken in the Arnhem Land region;[20] and it is reasonable to suppose that his studies did, to some extent at least, influence native thought. He and his work were still remembered in 1946-47, more or less clearly, by natives along the coast from Milingimbi to Yirrkalla.

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CHAPTER 18

THE PRESENT DAY

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Looking back over the years we can glimpse, in perspective, the panorama of contact that the Arnhem Landers have had with peoples of alien groups. We have seen, too, something of the effects. At first, the Aborigines were willing to adjust themselves to foreign ways. This period lasted for some time, and was accompanied by a certain amount of assimilation, but its main feature was the gradual conditioning of these natives to the waves of contact that were to follow. While they were adjusting themselves to Indonesian infiltration and settlement, they were at the same time building up a strong resistance against other forms of alien contact; and they were absorbing into their own culture certain new elements, rejecting others that could not readily be adapted to the existing pattern. Religious ideas, ceremonies and song-cycles, as well as material objects, were accepted, and welded on to the indigenous framework without destroying its basic structure. The new economic organisation that arose had its origin in local as well as in alien forms. During this early period the Aborigines' social horizons were extended and their world was no longer the small place that it had been; and for some of them, too, this involved travel and personal observation beyond the confines of the Australian mainland.

As time passed European visitors, settlers and traders made their appearance, shattering the delicate balance that the Aborigines and Indonesians had built up on the basis of their trading relationships. This Arnhem Land coast, that the Indonesians had looked on as their own preserve, was now disputed by a nation

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which extended its dominion over the Australian mainland. An era had drawn to a close, and the last phase of Indonesian contact had begun.

As the years passed, as the settlers penetrated steadily into western Arnhem Land and European exploration was intensified, these new traders extended their fields, and ill-feeling developed between Indonesians and Europeans. All this led to a period of unsettlement as far as the Aborigines were concerned. Their smoothly functioning trading ties were broken. Competition became the order of the day, and with it came thinly-disguised exploitation.

The Indonesians not only clashed with the Europeans. They succeeded in stirring up unrest and antagonism among the Aborigines — antagonism that was later manifested against European and Indonesian alike. In the confusion that followed, with the rush to exploit local products and available native labour, the Aborigines received the full impact of these unsettled times. The result for them was, in the western region, disaster and depopulation, and in the east, spasmodic fighting to assert themselves and to defend their rights. When the Indonesian trading was brought to a close the whole position was accentuated and the increased activities of the European traders did not serve to improve matters.

Japanese visitors, too, became more numerous and helped to bring about a state of affairs in which the Aborigines were more or less continually on the defensive. It was this background that produced the murders and "massacres" of the early 1930's. But even then, although Arnhem Land received a great deal of attention from interested and dis-interested bodies in the South, as well as in the Territory itself, conditions remained fundamentally the same. Certainly, physical violence was largely reduced, but many other insidious forms of contact continued. Through Dr Thomson's recommendations, permission to enter Arnhem Land was granted less readily to traders and other non-Aboriginals, especially since in 1931 this region had been declared an inviolable Reserve. But this did not really check the influx of Japanese into these coastal waters. In fact their infiltration was intensified during this period and brought with it, as we have seen, many

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175 648 undesirable elements. Dr Thomson, for example, has commented on the demoralising effects of Japanese association with the Aborigines.

Summarising, then, we can observe that the long period of Baijini-Macassan contact resulted in some measure of adjustment between alien and Aboriginal; and while no other elements were present, the *status quo* was maintained. With the advent of another cultural group conditions were altered, and the period of unsettlement commenced. As still other elements made their appearance on the north coast, this unrest among the Aborigines was accentuated, and lasted more or less continuously until 1942, when they began to experience repercussions from the second World War.

However, the establishment of the Arnhem Land Reserve, the murders of the 1930's, and the pacification expeditions which followed, did herald a new epoch. And although this period of unsettlement continued, mainly owing to the presence of large numbers of Japanese, it was actually drawing to a close. The administration was becoming more directly interested in the welfare of the Arnhem Landers. Recommendations relating to Aboriginal policy were being drafted, missionary enterprise was being extended, with more apparent official backing, and a Native Affairs Branch was gradually being formed. These were the principal indications that the old period was coming to an end, even if the new ideas could not yet be put into practice. Indeed, their execution was postponed for some years by the entry of the Japanese into the second World War, and the placing of the Territory under complete military control.

175 797 Let us pause to consider the position of the Missions in Arnhem Land, and their part in the general overall picture of culture contact.

Between 1846 and 1848, a Roman Catholic missionary priest named Rev. D. Angelo Confalonière was stationed at Port Essington.[1] In 1900, also in western Arnhem Land, a small Mission station was started under the control of a Mr Lennox, but its stay was brief and unsuccessful.[2] The Roper River Mission began operations in the first years of this century (1908) and extended its activities to Groote Eylandt in 1921, concentrating there at

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first on half-caste children, but later taking in full-blooded Aborigines. During the early years of the Groote Eylandt station there was continual dissension between the missionaries and Aborigines. At one time it was found necessary to barricade the Mission buildings and to build a stockade against an expected attack by mainland Aborigines, who were camping nearby in some force. These were stormy days. But eventually a more or less static camp of peaceful natives grew up around the Mission, and an increasing number came into direct contact with the missionaries. At Oenpelli, too, in western Arnhem Land, the Church Missionary Society in 1925 took over a Government Aboriginal cattle station which had been managed by the former buffalo shooter "Paddy" Cahill. The station was allowed to pass into Mission hands mainly because it was, at the time, failing to pay its way.

The Methodists opened their first station at Goulburn Island in 1916. In the words of one of the missionaries: "A few natives arrived and offered to help with the work, and shortly afterwards there were a hundred men, women and children on the station. The girls and boys were induced to attend the open-air school and think of the Mission station as their home".[3] There were half-castes here too, but a little before the War they were moved to the new station that was set up at Croker Island.[4] Later on Elcho Island Mission was opened; the missionaries withdrew to Milingimbi when the Petroleum Company commenced operations but finally returned. Milingimbi Mission continued to function. In 1935 the Methodists commenced a fourth Mission station at Yirrkalla, in the north-eastern corner of Arnhem Land.

That is to say, at the time of the most intense Japanese contact on the north coast seven Mission stations had been established, fringing the Reserve from west to east, and from north-east to south. These Missions were in contact with the great majority of local Aborigines, except for two or three small "pockets" of people in the Liverpool district, on the mainland south of Milingimbi, and around Rose River. Even these had indirect and spasmodic association with the Mission stations. Points of white settlement in the shape of Missions, then, as now,

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virtually encircled Arnhem Land. Static camps of natives (severely criticised in Dr Thomson's reports) were formed at all these places, so that today, and as the years pass, more and more natives look to one or more of these stations as their "home". They remain in the Bush for increasingly shorter periods, finding it always harder to keep away from these centres as they come to rely on the introduced food and trade goods. And so they find it necessary to pay lip-service to Christianity.

We are not concerned here with discussing in detail missionary endeavour in this region, because this would require a great deal more space than can be spared for it here. Readers interested in this form of contact should consult the relevant Government reports, as well as those issued by the Mission bodies themselves.[5] No scientific study of this problem has as yet been made in Australia. Here, however, we are interested only in broad principles. More detailed discussion of Mission and administrative policies, against a background of the general Australian situation, is given by Professor Elkin in his *Citizenship for the Aborigines*.[5a]

Mission activities before the recent War were virtually confined to establishing themselves on a more or less self-supporting basis. And since they were centres of white settlement, with them came many features of European culture. This is an important point to remember. These missionaries not only brought certain elements of their own Christian doctrine, but also carried with them the essential ingredients of their own culture. Whether or not the missionary desired it, the acceptance of Christianity by the Aborigines thus involved their simultaneous adoption of European ways, at the expense of their own culture and their own religion. If the Aborigines wanted to live in peaceful association with these missionaries and to receive their alleged benefits in the form of food, goods and education, they were obliged either to discard their own way of life or to adjust it in some way to changing conditions. In actual practice they were left with no alternative. Conditions were unsettled, alien influences demoralising, and tribal disintegration imminent. Gradually they drifted into the stations, hoping to take advantage of their presence, and at the same time to retain their traditional heritage.

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But it was not possible for any group, under the circumstances in which the Arnhem Landers found themselves, to have their cake and also to eat it.

The Missions were interested in gathering together groups of natives around the stations. Only in this way could settlements be built up, and the new ways firmly entrenched in the minds of the natives. They built houses in which to live, and churches in which to propagate their religion – for this was, after all, the main reason for their presence. Gardens were cultivated; and some of them engaged in trading; for missions had to be economically "safe", just like other forms of business. Schools at this period functioned very intermittently. Their range of subjects was limited and related primarily to religious training. Aboriginal children were not given a clear picture of European culture and its relation to the rest of the world, nor taught how to adjust themselves to these new conditions. Food was distributed either for work accomplished, or virtually as "bait" to attract natives to visit the stations, or to attend church or school. But on the whole the work of missionaries seems to have been dictated by purely humanitarian ideals.

The functioning of their stations depended greatly on the personality of the superintendents, and on their tolerant and sympathetic understanding of Aboriginal custom and belief. The Missions were acting as bulwarks against more unpleasant aspects of European and alien contact. They did demonstrate to the natives that all Europeans were not the same, and that some had more kindly intentions than others. Missionaries attended to the sick, the aged and the young. But these early years of Mission contact were mainly occupied with "digging in", with establishing their position and developing a formula by which to approach their problems. The natives had now a refuge to which they could retreat. In spite of all this, the presence of Missions did not prevent their contact with the Japanese and the European traders.

With the first raid on Darwin on 19 February 1942, when the North was thrown into confusion, Japanese trading activities ceased. Plans were made to evacuate female missionaries (as well as civilian women and children), and many of the mixed-bloods from Croker Island and Groote Eylandt; and the whole northern

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175 part of the Territory was placed under complete military control
648 as from 21 February of that year.[6]

The Aborigines of Arnhem Land soon realised this position. Some drifted back to the bush, while others stayed around the Missions, with their skeleton male staffs. Others again, particularly from the Roper River, from western and south-western Arnhem Land, and from Milingimbi, went overland to seek employment with the Army, and later on special Army native settlements were set up along the main North-South road.[7] The Missions tried to keep going, but owing to staff shortages their work was virtually at a standstill. Everything was subordinated to military control and activity. The Army made patrols out to Oenpelli, and to other places on the fringe of Arnhem Land. The Air Force set up bases at north Goulburn Island, near Oenpelli, at Gove (near Yirrkalla), in the Wessels, and on Groote Eylandt. At Gove, the largest of these, hundreds of Army, Naval and Air Force personnel were stationed or passed through, and came into direct contact with local Aborigines. Many of the natives themselves experienced something of the more unpleasant aspects of warfare. Milingimbi station was bombed, and in the Wessels three natives lost their lives when a missionary was taken prisoner on a Japanese seaplane. Naval boats patrolled the coast fairly regularly, and aeroplanes were a common sight to the natives.

175 Without dwelling at any length on this period, we may say
177 briefly that it brought with it further unsettlement. The Aborigines were thrown into intensive contact with a great many people belonging to a very different culture, and representing various shades of opinion and behaviour within that culture. Apart from physical appearances, they were in the natives' eyes quite unlike previous visitors. They were neither traders nor officials, police nor missionaries, but a group which, as far as the natives were concerned, was more or less disinterested. Some treated the local people in the way that Europeans usually did, and others looked on them rather as fellow human beings. Their services were required from time to time; they were employed in various ways, receiving payment in money or goods, and many of them also were given presents of various kinds.

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Military contact upset the Aborigines' economic system, and caused some disorganisation in their camp life. They were so thoroughly preoccupied with the intruders that certain features of indigenous life inevitably suffered. Or rather, perhaps, the disintegration that had really commenced early in the 19th century, and was intensified in the 1930's, was precipitated. Elements that had been weakened by this early strain were now yielding ground. Insubordination became common among younger men and women, and certain established codes of behaviour showed signs of collapse. Strange and novel aspects of European culture were thrust upon them, and often they were bewildered with what they saw, and confused at what they heard. The impact had been sudden, and not gradual as it had been in the past; and although these Arnhem Landers had been conditioned throughout the centuries against alien contact, they were not ready to receive it in such force, and at such speed, as this.

However, this military contact, which lasted for approximately four years, did have some beneficial effects. The Aborigines came to realise that European culture and opinion were not uniform and static, but existed in various forms. This was all to the good. Many of the natives developed a strong desire to learn more about European conditions, and how these affected their own way of life. In some instances they became articulate, and demanded some form of practical education and training through which they could achieve this knowledge; but this, of course, was not general. Many young men and women who sought these aims were classed as revolutionaries by older people, who believed that they were trying to weaken tribal authority and cast aside the traditional dictates of their group. It is true, too, that in some cases this was the underlying motive, a consequence of the unsettled period through which they had come. But there were some who genuinely desired to find means of adjusting themselves and their culture to European ways. They desired, indeed, something that few Europeans were capable of giving. Missionaries, administrative officers, and even anthropologists, had not gone deeply enough into the practical side of this problem.

The military forces, too, satisfied the Arnhem Landers' love of material possessions. To most of them, it was like a return to the

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old Indonesian days of plenty. Organised work was available; and in return they received food, clothing, tobacco, and other objects which they considered necessary to their well-being. This proved to be another disintegrative feature, for indigenous forms of economy were disturbed, and the Aborigines came to rely on the European to supply their immediate needs. There was not, now, the urgent need to hunt and forage for food; and they tended to congregate fairly regularly in one place, usually on the Mission station or near the military settlement.

This particular form of contact is so recent that is is very difficult to see its problems in true perspective. It is possible only to observe the effects with care, and to conjecture as to the future.

Civilians were allowed to return to Darwin on 28 February 1946, and civil administration was resumed from the end of July 1945.[8] In the years that followed, up to the present day, the Missions have been concerned primarily with re-establishing themselves, after losing so much ground during the War period. Mission staffs were depleted, and only now are being built up again. New buildings had to be constructed, new gardens cultivated. In fact, all aspects of their work needed reconstruction. Some Missions suffered more than others; but actually all benefited from this renovating approach, for most were desperately in need of this even before the War. The old relatively lethargic ways of the past, although they were virtually pioneering days, had to go, if Mission contact was to be of constructive value to the Aborigines themselves. Saving souls for the indefinite future was really to no purpose; the natives required practical help in the problems which beset them. And today the majority of the missionaries realise this aspect of their work. They are educational and humanitarian agents of their culture, and their presentation of formal religion should take a secondary place.

If the long period of unsettlement in Arnhem Land is to end, if the new epoch of which we spoke previously is to continue, and if the Aborigines are to be adjusted to changing conditions and a European way of life, then the missionary and the administrator must have a common purpose: to develop among these Aborigines some understanding of European culture and ideals,

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to retain the best elements in their own culture, to set them on a firm economic footing, and above all to allow them to think and act for themselves. These aspirations are, as yet, only embryonic. Whether or not they will come to fruition rests primarily on the European agencies within the boundaries of Arnhem Land, and those immediately interested in its future.

During the war years, then, Mission activity was at a standstill. Church services were still held, but schools and training centres are only now being properly organised. Here, again a co-ordinated plan is needed where educational activities are concerned, and recently the Commonwealth Office of Education has been paying some attention to this.

When the Armed Forces withdrew from the greater part of Arnhem Land, the Aborigines were thrown on to the resources of the Missions, and they looked to these centres to fill the gap. Now, as we have seen, many of them are coming to settle more or less permanently around the Mission settlements, and they are demanding employment so that they may maintain the standard of living to which they have grown accustomed. But so far none of the Mission stations has been able to employ all of these potential labourers, and none has adequate means of training them for this work that they desire. In present circumstances these stations can only take a certain number of employees. Before others can be absorbed, new industries must be developed. This, together with education, is one of the most urgent problems facing Missions and administrations today. Employment must be relatively permanent and also remunerative, if it is to have desirable results. There are many incidental problems to be considered as well.

Although some aspects of native traditional life are still virile today, others are showing signs of collapse. Past alien contact has left its mark on the indigenous culture. This is more obvious in western Arnhem Land than in the east, although even there certain elements have almost disappeared. But a well balanced educational approach, including occupational training, should help to arrest social and cultural disintegration, strengthen traditional ties, and provide strength to meet future demands.

9: Thomson E-5 (1935-1943)1949
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orders (mother-in-law and husband of mother-in-law[35]) to build up goodwill, *märaŋguma*, lit. "to build up *marr*" (see page 37) and deliberately intended to leave a feeling of obligation (*vide supra* page 43).

(5) *buku djauyun*, straight-out exchange or barter, in which one article is balanced against another. In Arnhem Land, where the ceremonial aspect even of transactions in which commodities change hands, is stressed, it is the "giving" that is the important matter, the rite, the gift and counter gift, rather than the assessment of its value or equivalent (see below no. 6).

(6) *mälli*, buy or purchase. The idea of direct purchase is foreign to the Arnhem Land socio-economic pattern and probably owes its origin to the influence of Indonesian culture. In former times the Macassar voyagers arrived on the coast of Arnhem Land with the north-west monsoon and dispersed along the coast to their regular fishing stations, vessels returning again and again to the same areas which they had visited in previous years and where they set up depots on shore for the boiling and smoking of *bêche-de-mer* or trepang.

The Macassar voyagers recognised the native ownership of land, and the people say that they paid tribute each season to the owners of the territories for the right to fish for trepang and pearls. In referring to this *payment* by the Macassar visitors it is significant that the natives used the word *mälli*. My informants stated that the natives themselves did not actually work for the Macassar trepangers but occa-

[35] The special status of this man as the recipient, depends chiefly upon the fact, not that he is *kauwäl* (mother's brother), but that he is the husband of *mukul rumaro*, wife's mother, actual or potential.